

# critical digest

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The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

## N.Y. Openings This Week

Second Threshold-Morosco, 1/2/50. Alfred de Liagre, Jr.'s production of Philip Barry's last play revised by Robert Sherwood. Cast stars Olive Brook and Margaret Phillips. Staged by the producer.

## Digest of Current Reviews - more on back page

Captain Brassbound's Conversion-City Center, 12/27/50. Mild favorable reviews greeted first winter production of N.Y. City Theatre Company. Shaw revival starring Edna Best and John Archer drew only one dissenter. Unlike his colleagues who praised director Morton DeCosta, Field, Newark News, thought the entire production lacked style and authentic staging. Several commented that first act was rather tedious, but felt play picked up pace later. The daily critics also agreed that play written early in Shaw's career must be marked down as a "minor" work. Edna Best as Lady Cicely walked away with the acting honors. Show is scheduled for limited run.

Twentieth Century-ANTA Playhouse, 12/24/50. ANTA's third production hit the critical and commercial jackpot, judging by the daily reviews. Jose Ferrer and Gloria Swanson were warmly applauded as stars of Hecht-MacArthur revival. Direction by Ferrer shared equal plaudits with his acting ability. Pollock, Compass, didn't enjoy the play. He felt that the authors were snowed under by their own brilliance. Chapman, News, was puzzled by exactly how show fulfilled aims of ANTA, but he loved it anyway. McClain, Journal American, thought the stars so overwhelming that the supporting players were left several times on a dark stage with little to do or say. Miss Swanson, who has had scant stage experience, won all the critics to her side. Atkinson Times, voiced minor complaint that modern version of play was a bit too truncated, especially in the final scene. William Lynn received praise as leader of supporting cast. Watts, Post, is holding out to see Richard Mansy himself play the role of the press agent.

King Lear-National, 12/25/50. Split decision filed by daily critics over Joseph and Cohen production starring Louis Calhern. Three voted against production and play, assuming that classic was meant for library and not theatre. Majority praised production as the best possible. John Houseman, the director, shared honors with Calhern. Several considered play the best Shakespeare production in years. Large supporting cast headed by Edith Atwater, Nina Foch, Martin Gabel and Arnold Moss were highly praised. Score by Marc Blitzstein was called his best by several. Dissenters included critics of Herald Tribune, Mirror and World-Telegram and Sun. Critic of latter suggested that only in a motion picture version could the full fury of emotions involved be captured. Atkinson, Times, doubts if the storm scene can be played intelligently by anyone. Watts, Post, is convinced that play can be successfully produced, though this production shows only the possibilities.

## Editorial Pros & Cons

Welcome New Year's gift to theatregoers would be variety of guests furnished various media for theatre publicity interviews. Now dozens of local and network radio and TV shows interview the very same theatre personalities, often on the same day. Newspaper and magazine interviews also feature the same handful of stars. Listeners and readers get to the point where they can recite the anecdotes better than the actors.

# - - - - - ' A Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance ' - - - - -

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the shows for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

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|-------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times             | 11. Women's Wear Daily  | 21. Freeman         |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune    | 12. Wall Street Journal | 22. Commonweal      |
| 3. NY News              | 13. Journal of Commerce | 23. Cue             |
| 4. NY Mirror            | 14. George Jean Nathan  | 24. Chr.Sci.Monitor |
| 5. NY Compass           | 15. Ward Morehouse      | 25. Sat.Review Lit. |
| 6. NY Post              | 16. Morning Telegraph   | 26. Newsweek        |
| 7. NY Journal American  | 17. Variety             | 27. Time            |
| 8. World Telegram & Sun | 18. Billboard           | 28. Nation          |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle       | 19. Theatre Arts        | 29. New Republic    |
| 10. Newark News         | 20. New Leader          | 30. New Yorker      |

Affairs of State-Music Box, 9/25/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-7-8-13-17-18-27-30.  
Con: 1-6-9-10-11-12-14-15-19-20-22-24-25-26-29. None: 16-21-23-28.

Arms and the Man-Arena, 10/26/50. Pro: 4-9-10-11-17-18-21-23-29.  
Con: 1-2-3-5-6-7-8-12-13-14-15-20-26. None: 16-19-22-24-25-27-28-30.

Bell, Book & Candle-Barrymore, 11/14/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-18-23-24-25-26-27-28-30. Con: 2-6-15-17-22. None: 16-19-20-21-29.

Black Chiffon-48th St.Theatre, 9/27/50. Pro: 1-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-13-14-16-17-18-19-20-23-24-26-28-30. Con: 2-3-12-22-27-29. None: 15-21-25.

Bless You All-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Pro: 2-3-4-6-7-8-9-20-23-24-26-28-30.  
Con: 1-5-10-11-15-17-18-27. None: 12-13-14-16-19-21-22-25-29.

Call Me Madam-Imperial, 10/12/50. Pro: 1-2-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-20-22-23-24-25-26-27-30. Con: 18-19-28-29. So-So: 3. None: 16-21.

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 2-3-4-5-6-7-9-10-11-13-15-16-17-18-19-23-24-26-27-28-30. Con: 1-8-12-22-25-29. So-So: 14. None: 20-21.

The Country Girl-Lyceum, 11/10/50. Pro: 1-2-3-5-6-7-9-10-11-12-13-15-18-20-22-23-24-25-26-29. Con: 4-8-14-27-28-30. None: 16-17-19-21.

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-15-16-17-19-24-26-29-30. Con: 6-28. So-So: 14-18-22-23-27. None: 20-21-25.

Guys and Dolls-46th St.Theatre, 11/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-17-18-20-22-23-24-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 28. None: 16-19-21.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 1-2-3-4-7-8-9-11-12-13-14-16-17-18-22-23-24-25-29. Con: 5-6-15-19-26-27-28-30. None: 10-20-21.

Kiss Me Kate-Shubert, 12/31/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-14-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-27-30. Con: 29. None: 20-21-28.

The Lady's Not For Burning-Royale, 12/8/50. Pro: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-10-12-13-14-15-18-20-22-23-24-25-26-27-28. Con: 3-5-11-29. So-So: 17-30. None: 16-19-21.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 1-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-15-16-17-18-19-22-23-24-25-26-28-29. Con: 14. So-So: 2-27-30. None: 20-21.

Mister Roberts-Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 1-2-3-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-11-12-13-15-17-18-19-22-23-25-26-27-29-30. Con: 24. So-So: 14-16. None: 20-21.

Out Of This World-Century, 12/21/50. Pro: 4-5-6-7-8-11-23. Con: 1-3-9-17-18-26-27. So-So: 2. None: 12-13-14-15-16-19-20-21-22-24-25-28-29-30.

SIX SHOWS OMITTED THIS WEEK - COMPLETE LISTINGS NEXT WEEK

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' Green Room Department '  
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HIGH & LOW...Award giving in San Francisco is taken seriously; best and worst performances and plays are chosen by Critic's Council. Shirley Booth, Sidney Blackmer, and Thomas Mitchell were chosen best actors, with Frank Fay elected as worst actor for his performances in If You Please. Strictly Dishonorable was voted the worst non-musical play of the year.

REVIEW DODGE...Abe Burrows' first try at drama criticism on CBS "Hear It Now" didn't meet with favor of Crosby, Herald Tribune. Radio and TV critic accused Guys and Dolls author of dodging the play under question completely...Crosby in Christmas column apologized to Samson Raphaelson for blaming him for poor Accent on Youth sketch. Blame all goes to ANTA for taking scene out of context for ABC TV Showtime USA.

BROADWAY ADVICE...A young actress from South Dakota received diverse advice on ABC-TV Faye Emerson. Vinton Freedley advised her to try for a Broadway career for five years; if nothing materializes she should turn her talents elsewhere. Flora Robson and Miss Emerson suggested the girl study and act as much as possible in her home town.

NEGROES ON STAGE...Both on Broadway and in London's West End the Negro is now being treated by dramatists as an intelligent human being, comments Duperly, Stage. Until the last war, Negroes were usually accepted for inferior roles. Turning point came with Paul Robeson's Broadway production of Othello.

NEW MEASUREMENTS...Council of Living Theatre's plans for forthcoming year shouldn't be scrapped because of changed world conditions, emphasizes Theatre News Weekly. Instead, new measurements and evaluations should be made to enlist the entire amusement industry in the national service program. Theatre plays an important part in the building of morale by providing a relaxation in times of stress.

CRITICS' BOOKS...Three books by colleagues were praised by Watts, Post. Annual theatre books by John Chapman, George Jean Nathan and John Mason Brown are up to top form. Though he didn't agree with all opinions expressed, he does recommend "The Burns Mantle Best Plays of 1949-1950", "The Theatre Book of the Year", and "Still Seeing Things".

BACKWARD GLANCE...Musings of the stilled globe in the News lobby brought back memories of 23 years of professional playgoing to Sylvester, News. On Borrowed Time was the most emotional night ever spent. Other memories included songs by Ethel Waters and Helen Morgan and dancing by Carmen Amaya.

PRO IBSEN...Slurring comments at Ibsen in Hilda Crane review by Kerr, Commonweal, were answered by letter from Martin Svaglic. He charged the critic with oversimplifying Ibsen, and of confusing him with Zola and Shaw.

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' Theatre News Round Up '  
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National Theatre Assembly will be heard in N.Y. Jan.2-4, though Actors Equity suggested it should be abandoned...Louis Sobol, Journal American, has renewed his Hearst contract for two more years...Brattle Theatre, Cambridge, Mass. will present Back to Methuselah in two parts...Harvey angels are suing Brock Pemberton's estate for \$95,000 undistributed profits of play...N.Y.Teachers admitted they miss theatre because of low income, survey by Fine, Times, discovered...Baseball owner Bill Veeck starred in Cleveland production of The Man Who Came To Dinner...George S. Kaufman and Abe Burrows will join Guys and Dolls crap scene some night in near future; Variety headlined story "Type Casting".

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' Interview Hi-Lights '  
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VALERIE BETTIS...Bless You All dancer took role in current hit because the producers promised her a song, she admitted to Torre, WT&S. The show stopper 'I Forgot To Register' is the result. She considers the greatest sin is to waste talent. The people who have to overcome deficiencies through struggle and hard work really go places, she believes.

MORTON DA COSTA...Captain Brassbound's Conversion director spent five weeks preparation on script before the two week rehearsal period, he told Rice, Post. The trick of the production, he discovered, is to catch the audience up in the story, and yet play it for its humor as well as its melodramatic plot.

B.S.PULLY...Guys and Dolls featured actor got part in show by accident, he insisted to Wilson, Post. The deep voiced comedian attended tryouts with a friend. When the director heard his unusual voice he was given a part. The initials, claims the columnist, really stand for "Bernard Shaw".

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' Digests of Current Reviews '  
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Out of This World-Century, 12/21/50. Cole Porter's new musical drew only two "pro" reviews from weekly reviewers. Gibbs, New Yorker, and Gabriel, Cue, found it typical Porter quality. Gibbs did admit that many of the songs sounded familiar, while Gabriel singled out Janet Collins as the most exciting dancer. Four critics who panned the show welcomed Charlotte Greenwood back to theatre after long absence. As has been customary this season, physical production once again drew more raves than the live talent. Sets and costumes by Lemuel Ayres were credited with actually living up to title. News weekly and trade magazine critics agreed on this point.

Bless You All-Hellinger, 12/14/50. Chalk up three more favorable criticisms from weekly critics for Rome-Auerbach revue starring Jules Munshin, Mary McCarty, Pearl Bailey and Valerie Bettis. They were received from Shipley, New Leader, Marshall, Nation, and Crisler, Christian Science Monitor. Marshall didn't enjoy dancing of Bettis, but did think there was much genuine wit in the skits. Shipley termed it "a good old fashioned type musical".

Let's Make An Opera-Golden, 12/13/50-12/16/50. Short lived Show of the Month-Peter Lawrence production rated an additional three "cons" from weekly critics. George Jean Nathan was indignant that the management should have asked him to perform in public, his charge for such employment is \$3,000 an evening, plus taxi fare. Crisler, Christian Science Monitor, believes quick flop proves that theatre audiences are not as low brow as radio audiences who thrive on audience participation. Event could only make Shipley, New Leader, remember his childhood amateur theatrical days.

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' Legit Stuff '  
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Shows that closed included Hilda Crane...ANTA's Twentieth Century may move to the Fulton, Jan. 8th...King Lear selected by Shakespeare Club of N.Y. for Twelfth Night party...Kelcey Allen, Women's Wear, has article in Variety annual entitled "On the Broadway Sidelines"...Howard Barnes, Herald Tribune, was ill for a week...Wood Soames Oakland Tribune, seeing the plays...Katherine Cornell gave special matinee of Captain Carvallo for ill William McDermott, Cleveland Plain Dealer, in his home...UNESCO named March as "Theatre Month"...Ole Olsen opened "Garzapoppin" auto laundry on Long Island...Hannen Swaffer is collecting obits of GBS, editors asked to forward them to Lady Astor, The Hoe, Plymouth, England...Carol Chenwing, Gentlemen Prefer Blondes, elevated to stardom...Paul Denis, Compass, compiling "Celebrity Cook Book"...Margaret Truman named honorary chairman of Bicentennial Committee of the Council of Living Theatre

